

March 16, 2000

*(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)*

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: It is now my honor and pleasure to welcome to this forum and hearing today Ajia Tubten Juimai Gyatso, the Ajia Rinpoche, a respected leader of the Tibetan Buddhist community. We are particularly honored that this is the first time since he sought asylum a year ago that he has chosen to make a public statement. As a child, Lousang Tubten Juimai Gyatso was enthroned at the Kumbum Monasteries, a reincarnated Ajia Rinpoche; and during the cultural revolution, he was branded a counterrevolutionist, an enemy of the people, and forced into labor, prohibited from studying his Tibetan Buddhism.

During the Cultural Revolution, however, he was restored to his position as abbot of the monastery. He then worked out, or the government worked out with him a relationship in which they were able to function together, and he was named the vice-president of the Chinese Buddhist Association. But after being pressured to take positions that violated his conscience that he believed did not serve his people, he decided that he had no choice to escape; that he could not play a role in the Chinese Buddhist Association and as a tool of the government in the way that they had wanted him to do.

He remains, I believe, still formally the senior abbot of the monastery and the vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China. He escaped to the United States a little more than a year ago.

We are truly honored to have you here today. Your presence here embodies the purpose of this Commission and of its work, and we look forward to hearing your statement.